

The Village of Golema Mmidi

Golema Mmidi was an unusual village because the people who lived there came from different tribes and different parts of Botswana. Many of them had been unhappy in their own parts of Botswana. But they all lived together happily in Golema Mmidi.

Dinorego explained this to Makhaya as they walked along.

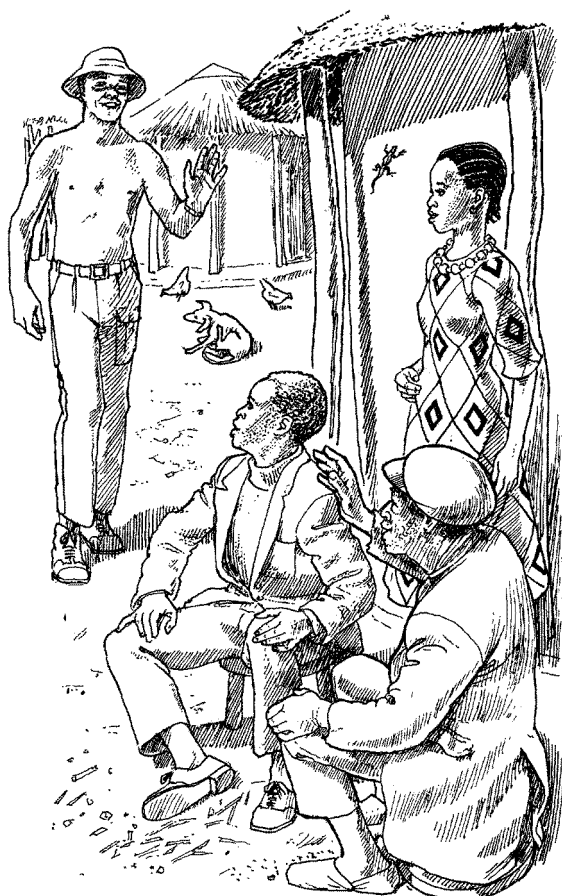
'We have an Englishman living in our village,' the old man added. 'He's really changed things!'

'An Englishman living in your village?' Makhaya repeated in surprise. 'He must be unusual!'

'He is. Gilbert Balfour came to Golema Mmidi three years ago. He has changed our village completely. He has given us new ideas about cattle farming. And shown us better ways of growing crops.'

'Tell me more about Gilbert,' Makhaya said quietly. 'He interests me.'

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A very tall, young white man was walking into the yard.

'I can't describe him,' Dinorego answered. 'You must see him for yourself. I call him my son, even though he is white. But he is a white man who eats village food. He asks my advice too, though his own head is full of ideas.'

The land around the two men had now changed. The thorn bushes had gone. The land was divided into plots⁹ and was ready for ploughing¹⁰. There were a few mud huts on each plot. The two men walked along the wide path. The path divided into two. Dinorego pointed to the left.

'This is the way to our village,' he said. 'The other path goes to the farm and the cattle ranch¹¹.'

They walked slowly through the trees towards the village. They stopped in front of three huts standing in a yard¹².

'Maria!' the old man called. 'I have brought a guest.'

A young woman was sweeping the yard which was edged with thorn bushes. She was a thin girl with bright, black eyes and a serious face. Maria greeted Makhaya politely and brought two hand-carved stools¹³ from one of the huts.

'Tea will soon be ready,' Maria said. 'Would the guest like water to wash?'

Makhaya smiled at the girl's polite words. Then he heard a noise behind him and he turned quickly.

A very tall, young white man was walking into the yard.

'This is Gilbert,' Dinorego said, with a smile. 'He's big, isn't he?'

Maria brought out another stool. Gilbert said something that made her laugh. Then she went to get the tea.

'Gilbert,' Dinorego said. 'I've found another son. His name's Makhaya.'

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Gilbert held out his hand to Makhaya. The Englishman was a very big man, with bright blue eyes and a deeply tanned¹⁴ face.

'Hello . . . Mack . . . Can I call you Mack?' he asked.

'If you like,' Makhaya said, taking Gilbert's hand. The two men looked at each other and smiled.

'I need someone like you to help me here,' Gilbert said. 'Come and have supper with me.'

So later on, Gilbert and Makhaya went back up the path. They walked on until they reached a big gate. Gilbert opened it.

'This is our farm,' Gilbert said. 'This is where I try out new ways of growing crops. This is the place I love. This is the place I dream about.'

Gilbert took Makhaya into his hut and began to prepare supper.

'I'm English, but I've made Botswana my home,' Gilbert said. 'I prefer life here and I like the people. What about you?'

'I'm a refugee¹⁵ from South Africa,' Makhaya told him. 'I ran away because I want freedom. And I want to live my life in my own way. I'd like to marry too. But I don't want a woman who expects me to make all the decisions. I want a woman who thinks for herself!'

Gilbert served the food and the two young men began to eat. Then Gilbert said, 'Do you think Maria is a woman who thinks for herself?'

Makhaya laughed. Gilbert made him feel calm and happy. Gilbert laughed too.

'I've asked Maria to marry me,' said Gilbert. 'But she said it was wrong for me to marry an uneducated woman. So I told her to get educated! Now I'm teaching her English and she's

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giving me lessons in Tswana⁶. She's a much better student than I am!

The two young men ate in friendly silence. Then Gilbert said, 'Are you going to stay here? Why did you leave South Africa?'

'I worked for a newspaper in a big town,' Makhaya answered. 'I saw things there that made me angry. I was put in prison, but I got out. I knew then that I had to escape from South Africa.'

'Can you drive a car?' Gilbert asked suddenly.

'Yes,' Makhaya answered. 'Why?'

'Well, driving a tractor is much easier. I need someone to do the ploughing. Also, I want someone to teach the women agriculture. It's the women in Botswana who grow crops. The name "Golema Mmidi" means "a place for growing crops".'

'But I don't know anything about growing crops!' said Makhaya in surprise.

'I do,' Gilbert told him. 'And I have my ideas all written down. But I can't teach. That would be your job. What do you think?'

Makhaya was amazed, but very pleased too.

'I think I'll accept the job,' he said quietly.

Without another word, Gilbert picked up a lamp and showed Makhaya the way to a hut.

'This is your hut,' he said.

Then they walked back to Dinorego's yard to get Makhaya's bag.

When the young men had gone back to the farm, Dinorego said to Maria, 'What do you think of the stranger, my child?'

'He's all right,' Maria answered. Then she stood up and went to bed.

For a long time, the old man sat looking at the fire. Would he never have grandchildren?